

Press briefing: September 18, 2026, 10:30 a.m.

Opening: September 18, 2026, 7 p.m.

Zanele Muholi

We Are Here

September 19, 2026–January 10, 2027

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The direct, focused gaze is confident and uncompromising yet vulnerable and powerful—a tension that is also reflected in the way the clothing is styled. In this self-portrait, photographer Zanele Muholi wears a bow tie, which is a symbol of Western-influenced men's clothing, and an Ingwe T-shirt, which has traditional male connotations in the Zulu communities of South Africa. Worn by Muholi, a nonbinary person, in this picture, it raises questions about the currency of gender roles, stereotypes, and traditions. *Phaphama*, the title of the photograph, means "Wake up!" in IsiZulu and seems like an invitation to look more closely. Who is depicted in pictures? Whose stories are told and saved in archives? And who remains invisible? Questions such as these are central to the oeuvre of Zanele Muholi, one of the most important voices in contemporary photography.

Following presentations of Zanele Muholi's works at Tate Modern London, Gropius Bau Berlin, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, FOTO ARSENAL WIEN is pleased to present *Zanele Muholi. We Are Here*, the photographer's first solo exhibition in Austria. The comprehensive show brings together more than 120 photographs, as well as video works and archival material from two decades, providing an intensive insight into the complex oeuvre.

Zanele Muholi (born in 1972 in Umlazi, South Africa) confidently uses the term *visual activist* rather than artist to refer to themselves. For more than twenty years, they have dedicated themselves to making Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people visible in South Africa and all around the world. The works are the products of a deep bond and are created through an intensive exchange with the people and communities portrayed; the works are to be understood as a contribution to a visual history that was long ignored or repressed. Although South Africa

was the first country in the world to guarantee the equality of people regardless of their sexual orientation in its constitution, discrimination, exclusion, and severe violence are still everyday factors in the life of queer people there. In the words of curator Marit Lena Herrmann (FOTO ARSENAL WIEN), "Embracing the community has shaped Muholi's work for over two decades: It is about revealing inequality and simultaneously about change. Muholi's images tell positive visual stories and show the power of togetherness and the healing that comes from this sense of community."

Zanele Muholi. We Are Here consists of six sections that bring together key series from different phases.

In the series *Being* (2006), Muholi focuses on intimate lesbian relationships. The photographs depict love, trust, and everyday life, creating images that reflect belonging and self-evident facts. Zanele Muholi observes, "Despite the fact that, in contrast to most other African states, our South African bill of rights guarantees us legal protections against homophobia, there are still no loving, intimate photographs of Black lesbians. As a visual artist, one is always confronted with the politics of representation. I have the choice to portray my community in a manner that will turn us once again into a commodity to be consumed by the outside world, or to create a body of meaning that is welcomed by us as a community of queer Black women. I choose the latter path, because it is through capturing the visual pleasures and erotica of my community that our being comes into focus, into community and national consciousness." ¹

Another focus of the exhibition is the ongoing project *Faces and Phases* (2006–). The archive, which now contains several hundred black-and-white portraits, is a collaborative project that brings together Black LGBTQIA+ people. Personal testimonies supplement the vivid archive of memory, presence, and community. Concurrently with the exhibition, the book *Faces and Phases* will be published by MACK, London (2026).

A rich program of events, tours, and education accompanying the exhibition invites visitors to take subjects such as queer Black visibility, memory, and social involvement

¹ Muholi, Zanele (2007): *Being*. Artist Statement for the exhibition *Being*, Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg

one step further. The focus of Muholi's oeuvre is always communicating with the local community and creating spaces for encounters and exchange. The accompanying program, which consists of discussions, workshops, tours, a conference, and book presentations, depends on various collaborations with institutions such as the Queer Analog Darkroom Collective, MEZEKERE, the Queer Museum Vienna, DER GREIF, and the Austrian Film Museum.

Zanele Muholi is the 2026 recipient of the internationally acclaimed Hasselblad Award. The award includes an exhibition in Gothenburg, which opens in October 2026.

Zanele Muholi is nonbinary, uses the pronouns they/them, and refers to themselves as a *visual activist*. When writing in German, please use the pronouns dey/denen/derer and refrain from using gendered terms such as Künstlerin and Fotografin or Künstler and Fotograf to describe them. It is not appropriate to use the pronouns she/her or he/him. Acceptable alternatives include visuelle*r Aktivist*in or Fotograf*in as well as referring to Muholi by name instead of a pronoun (for example, "in Muholi's exhibition" instead of "in her/his exhibition").

With support from

Stadt Wien Kultur, Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation

In cooperation with

Hasselblad Foundation, MEZEKERE, Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Queer Analog Darkroom Collective, Queer Museum Vienna

Media Partners and collaborations

Datum, DER GREIF, Der Standard, Ö1 Club

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September 19, 2026–January 10, 2027

Tues–Sun, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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Book Talk

September 19, 2026, 4 p.m., book talk with Zanele Muholi and Renée Mussai: *Faces and Phases*, FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

Film screening

September 20, 2026, 6 p.m., film screening: *Difficult Love* (2010) and *Enraged by a Picture* (2005) by Zanele Muholi, Austrian Film Museum, Augustinerstraße 1, 1010 Wien

Press kontakt

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Other information and image material are available at

www.fotoarsenalwien.at/en/press

About FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN is Austria's new center for photographic images and lens-based media. Inaugurated by the city of Vienna in March 2025, the institution presents and illuminates contemporary photography in all its forms and uses. FOTO ARSENAL WIEN also organizes the platform FOTO WIEN, Austria's largest, biennial photography festival, and, in a collaboration with the Kunsthalles Wien, the annual Festival Vienna Digital Cultures.

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

Press images

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Zanele Muholi, *Phaphama*, Cassilhaus, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2016, from the series *Somnyama Nyonyama*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Miss D'vine II*, 2007. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town

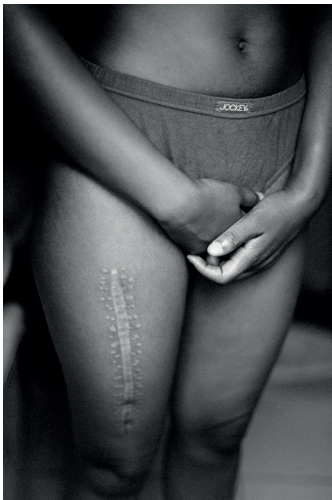
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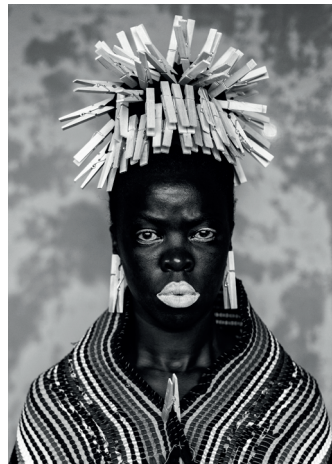
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Zanele Muholi, *Aftermath*, 2004, from the series *Only Half the Picture*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Charmain Carrol, Parktown, Johannesburg*, 2013, from the series *Faces and Phases*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Bester I, Mayotte*, 2015, from the series *Somnyama Nyonyama*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Liza I*, 2009, from the series *Being*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Zazi II*, Boston, 2019, from the series *Somnyama Nyonyama*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Bra*, 2003, from the series *Only Half the Picture*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Qiniso, The Sails, Durban*, 2019, from the series *Somnyama Nyonyama*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town



Zanele Muholi, *Miss Lesbian II, Amsterdam*, 2009, from the series *Miss Lesbian*. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson, New York, and Southern Guild, Cape Town